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CHRISTMAS TODAY



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Christmas To-Day

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GREAT WORD

Christmas To-Day

BY

HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE



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"*...A Spirit still, and bright*
With something of an angel light."

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CHRISTMAS TO-DAY

Prelude

IN this latitude Christmas Eve often falls on a still, cold night that heightens the cheer of the open fire. The hearth is the very heart of the house; other things may be beautiful in themselves and in the memories they keep fresh; but the hearth radiates motion, colour, warmth. The life of forgotten summers, distilled into fibre and sap and stored up in cells that open with petulant protests and send tiny streamers of colour into the genial blaze, gives its last residuum of vitality as an offering of the friendliness of Nature to man. They are ungrateful who talk

Prelude about the enmity of Nature; as if friendship were merely being agreeable, and not always at heart the loyalty of truth-telling. If Emerson was right in saying that our friends are those who make us do what we can, Nature is the most faithful and constant friend man has found on his mysterious journey. When the fire sings its song of summer on the wintry hearth he must be dull who does not hear the friendly note that runs through it.

But, like all friends who serve us with their integrity as well as warm us with their love, Nature seems at times remote and unkind. On Christmas Eve there is often a touch of bitterness in the air; a

sting that seems to mock the season's memories and hopes. The stars, Orion flaming in their midst like an "archangel full-panoplied against a battle day," sparkle with a chilling radiance. When one recalls the soft Syrian air under such a sky, splendidly isolated and remote, the sharp touch of winter is like a keen-edged mood of doubt with magical cunning building crystals of exquisite design out of inanimate substances, but blighting everything that grows. Beyond the seas, on such a Christmas Eve, the stars hang low and burn with soft and kindly radiance; here they shine across immeasurable gulfs of space and seem as indifferent to

Prelude

Prelude the little lights of intelligence with which men find their way in the world as is the sun to the glow-worm, faintly luminous for a moment and then swallowed up in blackness. In the Syrian night flocks are on the hillsides and shepherds keeping watch over them; here the living creature that is not sheltered perishes. There night broods over the fields like a bountiful mother; here one has the sense of a great absence rather than a great presence. The night is not haunted by malignant powers; it is cold, impersonal, inexorable; freighted with the majesty and loneliness of fate, and exhaling a remoteness and vastness too great

to be concerned with the little for- *Prelude*
tunes of men. Is it the stillness of
a dead faith or the silence that
comes with expectation, the quiet
that falls when a great advent is
at hand?

The Company

We were asking this question as we sat before the fire, conscious of a rich and comforting warmth in the heart of the bitter night. The group of faces upon which the light fell was set against a background of other faces so hidden that they seemed like memories. They were of that silent company, never absent, when friends sit together and talk of dear and familiar things, of those who have warmed themselves before the fire of life and passed on into the silence. The first Christmas Eve brought angels and men into a swift and luminous fellowship; every Christmas Eve, in these later times, brings together

those whose love for one another makes immortality credible. About every group on which the glow of the leaping flame rests there is a larger company, invisible but unforgotten, whose unseen presence is part of every festival of the heart, every celebration of the communion of the soul. *The Company*

Behind the little company, indifferently sombre or rich in garb, a wall of books rounded the circle to include the larger brotherhood of humanity; the fellowship of those who have made the journey and rest from travel. Each generation cheers itself with the memories of brave words and shining deeds, and makes time and death

The Company

tributary to the rising fortunes of life and the growing wealth of memory.

III

The Spell of Obscurity

As the talk circled about the central theme we were reminded that some one has said that faith in immortality is not a massive bridge spanning the dark stream on immovable arches, but a line of stepping-stones disappearing into the mist and darkness, over which each man finds his way alone. The thoughts that go deepest into the nature of things are often of a wonderful simplicity, as are the natures of men and women whose spirits have greatness of range. The sunsets that are like a sudden opening of windows in heaven are compounded of light and mist; the joys of life rise out of every-day rela-

The Spell of Obscurity

tionships, and the highest wisdom is the possession of those whose hearts are the hearts of children. The complex imposes upon us by the difficulties it seems to present to our intelligence. Obscure things bring a certain authority which rests on our ignorance, and we fall easy victims to the spell of the occult and mysterious. To clothe a commonplace in pretentious language is to secure a following; and is an old device of those to whom prophecy is a trade rather than a calling. There are always those whose eyes are holden so that they cannot see the beauty and holiness that wait in any place where men live, but must go to the ends of

the earth in a vain search for that which stands at their doors. Sir Launfal leaves the Christ at his gates when he goes on the long and idle quest, and finds his Master only when he has learned that the divine is always close at hand. The illusion of the remote, complex and obscure is the thinnest of veils to those who have once seen life face to face and passed through the process to the reality.

The Spell of Obscurity

IV

The Simplicity of Faith

SIMPLE things are incredible because we have lost the inward simplicity that knows them by instinct; because we subtly flatter ourselves when we treat ideas and arts as if they were the possession of a few who speak a special language; because we exalt knowledge above truth, and the methods of art above its substance; because we construct a science of political economy and leave out affections, passions, and imagination; because we strive to make religion philosophy, morality a system of rules, and immortality a physical instead of a spiritual fact. We have turned the search for truth into a vast and

complicated gymnastic instead of an inspiring and life-bringing climb heavenward. The Christmas story has become incredible to many because its marvellous simplicity separates it so far from the elaborations of our intellectual life. We crave a philosophical formula, a scientific demonstration, and we are offered a story so simple that we pass it on to our children; so deeply and marvellously beautiful that we discard it as fact and cherish it as poetry. It is another version of the old fable of the gods coming in disguise and being rejected because of the blindness of men; of great happiness waiting at the door barred by the dullness of heart

The Simplicity of Faith

The Simplicity of Faith

that did not turn when the guest knocked; of the divine cast out by men because it wore the guise of the human. At the heart of things there is a great simplicity, as there is a beautiful simplicity in noble men and women. Most of us are entangled in the knowledge we have so painfully piled up; we are only halfway through the process of being organized. We share the crudity which is part of an unfinished process, of a mass of things not yet put in order. We are so absorbed in elaborate methods that we often lose sight of the ends we are striving to achieve; we are putting tools and processes in place of art, scaffoldings in place of build-

The Simplicity of Faith

ings, knowledge in place of truth. We deal with the vast materials that have accumulated too much as day labourers and too little as architects; we make rapid inventories of brick and mortar instead of postponing valuation until the house is finished. We are so misled by mere mass that we have lost the sense of structure, and count ourselves rich, not by reason of what we have completed, but by the store of materials we have piled up. Xerxes made the same mistake when he counted his unorganized cohorts and the compact and disciplined Greek phalanx with the same numerals, and did not understand that he was giving crude material the value of organized force.

V

Processes & Finalities

We are so imposed upon by mass of material and by the complexity that comes with a vast number of separate objects, that we have lost sight of the fact that a principle explains a million phenomena as readily as it explains a hundred; that the end of culture as of spiritual striving is that beautiful simplicity which is the test and charm of the highest natures; that beyond the confusion of half knowledge and incomplete thinking, reflected in the complex and obscure style, truth lies like a limpid pool on the mountain with a star in its depths. Much of the vocabulary which philosophy has imposed upon it-

Processes & Finalities

self and upon us is a barbarous professional jargon fast becoming as curious and antiquated as chain armour. Pedants have claimed precedence over scholars because their knowledge, like the pedlar's stock in trade, was carried on their backs and could be spread out and counted to the last article; and impostors in religion, philosophy and art have impressed their fellows and made a living by all manner of magical tricks. Many a man has sat on the sward oblivious of the wonder and majesty of the world about him, and been transported out of himself by the mechanical cunning of a Hindu magician. The words of Christ, like the truth they convey,

Processes & Finalities

lie in a region beyond philosophy, science, the processes of education. They express the finalities for which we strive; but we are so encumbered with machinery, tools, and processes that few of us pass through the methods and stages of culture to the lucid heaven of attainment in which He lived and the language He spoke. We have gone so far astray that we have made skepticism, which is by its very nature a passing mood, the test of intellectual achievement, instead of faith which is the irradiation of character by truth.

VI

The Changed World

But it is idle to bring a railing accusation against all mankind and to count the difficulty of believing the Christmas story as a deliberate offense against the spiritual life of the race. Men do not conspire together to throw away their faiths; they lose them by the way and remain unconscious of their loss until in some crisis they put out a hand for help and find the supports missing. The atmosphere of the world has changed since the star shone over Bethlehem and the angels sang in the ears of men. The world in which Christ was born was less than a quarter of the globe; three-quarters lay in a shadow so deep

The Changed World

that they had no existence even for the most intelligent. That shadow has passed; the globe swings in a great burst of sunlight; Syria is a province so small and unimportant that it is counted among the least profitable possessions of a decaying empire; its ancient language is no longer spoken; the tide of action and interest barely touches it in these days of tremendous energies directed to ends of which Syria did not dream, in parts of the world which did not exist even for its prophets and poets.

More than this, the world itself has shrunk to the dimensions of a little star in a universe of suns, and on a clear Christmas Eve we look

The Lonely World

out on a universe whose receding lights fade along the illimitable frontiers of creation. The old, neighbourly, homelike earth on which Christ was born has become an infinitesimal part of a universe so vast that a chilling sense of insignificance has overshadowed the sense of possession which made the heart glad and proud in the old days. Knowledge has rolled in like a tide and many familiar landmarks have vanished. Where men once warmed their hands before the fire of life and lived at ease, they now stand shivering in the loneliness of those who have passed out of a home grown sweet with use and memory into a palace so vast that

The Lonely World

they are impotent to establish personal relations with it. And there are multitudes to whom even the shelter of a palace has been denied; they feel as if they had been turned out of doors, to live henceforth in an impersonal and lonely sublimity as indifferent to their fortunes as is the alp to the chalet which nestles on its slope, environed by indescribable splendour and then ruthlessly buried under an avalanche.

VII

Fortune and the Man

We are like men who have suddenly come into the possession of vast fortunes and are not yet on comfortable terms with our prosperity; we have not yet learned that while materials and tools have multiplied in our hands the inward power, the creative energy, remain unchanged. We have changed our way of living and imagine that we have changed our lives! The illusion of vastness, variety and complexity has confused us for the moment into the belief that the extension of our capital of facts has transformed the inner as well as the outer world, and that the mere mass of things has somehow low-

Fortune and the Man

ered the value of the soul. It has been noticed that the prosperity that builds the great studio and fills it with beautiful and expensive properties, often blurs the fertile imagination and makes the firm hand sluggish. For it is never a question of the size and furnishing of the workroom; it is always a question of the creative energy of the painter. It is never ultimately a question of the beauty with which the stage is set; it is always ultimately a question of the temperament and genius of the actor. Rich and elaborate furnishings do not change spiritual values; they only emphasize the need of energy and simplicity of character; for it is a

small matter whether the dressing of life is meagre or splendid, but it is a great matter whether the soul is master of its world. Charles Dudley Warner somewhere says that the charm of the best English society is great simplicity of nature against an opulent background; and it has been remarked that the heads of states, whose public appearances are made on a splendidly appointed stage, out of the public view live with great simplicity. If this were not so life in such stations would be unendurably burdensome. The essence of good breeding is indifference to the accidents of wealth and position; it is a delicate and sensitive recogni-

Fortune and the Man

Fortune and the Man

tion of essential values. Emerson was one of the finest gentlemen of his time because he treated every man with the deference due to an immortal spirit, and never showed the least curiosity as to the amount of luggage he carried on the journey through the world. For a host of people that journey has become mainly a matter of looking after the luggage; they have no time for scenery, the arts, the vision of nature, beautiful with intimations of immortal things for those who have kept open hearts and the joy of the open road.

VIII

The Stars and the Road

In the days when Christ was born, and for many centuries later, men spent half their time looking upward at the invisible heaven which shone radiant to their faith, and many were so lost in the heavenly vision that they gave to the rapture of vision the time due to human service, and forgot their duties in their ecstasy. To-day we are so absorbed in the study of the rare and wonderful things of the earth, and in the use of the mysterious forces that have come to our hands, that we have almost forgotten the ancient splendour of the heavens, and live and speak as if the glory that touched the older

The Stars and the Road

world with deathless hope had gone out in the chill morning of fuller knowledge.

The growth of the race has never been regular and symmetrical; leaving out of account the uncertain action of the will and the tragical downward tendency which has so often retarded a noble progress or wrecked a promising civilization, the inward energy has rarely been sufficient to keep the imagination, the intelligence, and the faculty for dealing with affairs on a common level of activity. No great community has yet used with authority the various languages of the spirit. The vitality of one race has gone into its moral conscious-

ness, of another into its passion for beauty, of another into its genius for order, of another into its power of dealing with affairs; no race has yet grown into perfect strength. Those who have seen the stars have often forgotten the duties of the road, and those who have made the highway secure have neglected the stars. Astronomy and road-making have rarely gone hand in hand.

The Stars and the Road

IX

Spirit and Task

In the vaster order of things which has taken the place of the pocket map of the universe with which our fathers were content, we are in danger of measuring the growth of the race by the standards of the nursery and reckoning the seasons of the universe by the changes in our gardens. The process of education which we call life has such divine ends and is of so vast a scope that it escapes the record of our little devices of examination and marking. The concentration of energy on the work of the hand, or of the brain or of the imagination which makes a one-sided civilization may ultimately contribute to

the rounded and complete education of the race; as the special emphasis on mathematics to-day, on biology to-morrow, and on Greek the day after, contributes to a well rounded education five years hence. *Spirit and Task*

Not only are the thoughts of men "widened by the process of the suns," but their work in different periods is very largely prescribed for them, and to hold them responsible for their choice of tools and materials is to ignore conditions which they did not make and tasks which were laid at their doors by an authority from which there is no appeal. In modern life the realization of a rich and rounded hu-

Spirit and Task

manity is endangered not by the urgency of practical work, but by complete surrender to it. No man can escape the task set for him, but no man need mutilate his nature in performing it; the spirit is entitled to an eight-hour day, and if a man works overtime and drains into his toil those spiritual potentialities which belong not to his task, but to his life, he cannot charge the impoverishment of his spirit to the order of things. The task is assigned; but each generation and each man decides in what spirit and with what regard for the soul it shall be performed. It is idle to condemn modern men for the selection of practical work when

that work confronts them on every side; but it is just to condemn them for a complete surrender to its demands.

Spirit and Task

Bacon's Prayer

FORMERLY men were absorbed in the vision of heaven; now they are absorbed in the vision of the fruitful earth. Science has turned the modern world into a colossal workshop, and the more sensitive the genius of a race or of a man to the tendency and movement of the age, the more irresistible the attraction of the majestic mechanism which is building the earth. This danger was foreseen by the man whose great mind led the way to the liberation of the joint energy of natural and human forces. In the preface to the earliest classic of this movement which now absorbs the modern world, Bacon prays

that "from the opening up of the pathways of the senses and a fuller kindling of the natural light, there may not result in men's souls a weakening of faith and a blindness to the divine mysteries." This is precisely what has happened; loss of faith, which is the most hopeless kind of blindness, has fallen upon men not because they have willed it, but because the faculty has been weakened by disuse. The will to believe has given place to the will to work; and, instead of factories planted here and there by great streams or out of sight in convenient places, and a rational division of time and strength between the work of the hands and

Bacon's Prayer

Bacon's Prayer

the work of the soul, the earth has become a colossal workshop, in which men and women live as if it were a home.

XI

The Illusion of Finality

We are imposed upon not only by complexity of knowledge, obscurity of speech and the scale on which material works are carried on, but by the age in which we live. Its atmosphere enfolds us like the air we breathe; its thought penetrates our minds through every form of expression; its gigantic works captivate or overwhelm our imagination; our education is shaped to meet its demands and fit us for its tasks. It is only by a powerful effort of the mind that we are able to separate ourselves from it, and look at it in the perspective of history. It wears the air and exercises the authority of a finality; and

The Illusion of Finality

yet it is only a phase of the unfolding of the human spirit, a stage in the experience of the race. Two hundred years hence it will seem as remote and unreal as the feudal age seems to us; and its standards and ideals will have become as purely historic as those of the men who wore chain armour and poured Greek fire on the daring assailants who swung catapults against bastioned walls and braved molten lead as they swam across shallow moats. The present is as real as was the past, and as fleeting. It is not a mere dream, a momentary combination of forms and colours and figures made by a turn of the kaleidoscope: it is actual, and our

The Illusion of Finality

relation to it is decisive for us; but it is not a finality. We must deal with it as if the whole of life were in it, but we must resist the illusion of completeness. It is a fragment of a fragment. It is not even a rounded period; it is a year in a decade, and there are ten decades in a century, and a century is but a chapter in the story. It is a small matter whether to-day believes or rejects the Christmas story: the real question is whether that story is credible, not to an age, but to the human spirit when its vision is clearest and most direct.

XII

The Authority of the Expert

THE beautiful story, which the world loves even in its most skeptical moments, curiously relates itself to the highest moods of the spirit, and its symbolism has an interior and convincing relation to the aspirations and hopes of men. One determining element in the discovery of spiritual and moral truth is strangely overlooked in our processes of investigation, and that is purity of life and harmony with its invisible order. In every other field of knowledge we demand the most sensitive and accurate instruments of observation. The appliances which equip our laboratories are made with the nicest

art and kept with the most painstaking care. Mechanism of exquisite delicacy of construction registers the faintest perturbation of earth or air; microscopes of the highest power reënforce the eye; telescopes, planted where vibration is at the minimum and clarity of air at the maximum, record the movements of stars on the far boundaries of space and analyze the fires that burn in the suns; the authority of the observer depends on the perfection of his vision; one of the foremost astronomers of the time owes his eminence to his extraordinary power of sight; physicians build great reputations on the intelligence which resides in

The Authority of the Expert

The Authority of the Expert

their finger tips and the acuteness of their faculty of hearing. In all other fields of knowledge we insist on special qualifications and peculiar gifts, and insist that the expert shall keep the organs he uses in the most perfect condition. If he violates the laws of health and his hand loses its steadiness, his eye its clear-sighted and far-sighted vision, his ear its acuteness, we set him aside as we set aside the instrument or mechanism that has lost its perfect adjustment. When an observer falls into this condition his authority departs and he no longer counts among the instruments of research.

XIII

Who are the Experts?

WHEN it comes to the world of spiritual knowledge, however, where the most delicate and sensitive instruments of observation are required, we forget the tests which science has taught us and we in turn apply to science, and listen to the reports of any man or woman who lays claim to that gift of prophecy, which is the knowledge of invisible things, without looking at their credentials. The man in the street does not assume to know astronomy and if he did we should give him small shrift of attention; but when the same man begins to speak of things which involve rare qualities of mind and character we

Who are the Experts?

listen as to an oracle. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; men and women of spiritual genius and of moral achievements alone speak with authority on these great matters. The faculty of spiritual observation rests primarily on harmony with those laws of health which are the expression of right relations to the universe. The man who violates these laws, whatever his gifts of mind may be, is as little entitled to credence when he speaks of spiritual things as is the astronomer when his sight has failed or the physician when his hearing has become dull. The only expert in the knowledge of the spiritual order is the man who has

kept his faculty of observation in the highest condition; but we take our views of life from moral invalids, from the morally insane, from those whose hands are incapable of steadiness, whose sight is a half blindness, and whose hearing is a partial deafness. *Who are the Experts?*

There are scores of books in our libraries which assume to reveal the invisible order of life to us, to interpret that life and to put the key to the mystery in our hands, which are mere transcriptions of temperament, reflections of moods, revelations of abnormal individual experience; and we accept these purely personal reports of moral and spiritual phenomena as if they

Who are the Experts?

were authoritative reflections of that vast order which reveals itself only to the sane, the humble, the pure in heart. The work of a diseased man of genius often possesses the fascination which resides in pathology, and often imparts the joy of art; but it is a personal memorandum and not a record of universal truth. The exaltation of personality, which is one of the great notes of modern as contrasted with ancient literature, and the immense emphasis on the authority of individuality in a democratic society, have given us a vast, rich literature which is of the highest importance as a disclosure of what is in man, but some of

which has no authority as a revelation of what life is in its fullness, nor of man in the highest reaches of his nature. A man of genius who is insane is vastly more interesting than a commonplace lunatic, but they are both mad; and the ravings and illusions of an entire asylum do not count against the word of one sane man.

Who are the Experts?

The Diffusion of Disease

Morality in the fundamental sense is not a social convention, but an expression of structural design; Mr. John Morley has well said that it is not *in* the order of things, it *is* the order of things. To get out of harmony with it is to get out of touch with life as a whole, out of adjustment to it. And this means inability to see things clearly and as a whole. Every violation of the laws of life develops a point of self-consciousness, and self-consciousness blurs the mirror which the well-balanced and healthful soul holds up to nature. Men of genius have become sometimes the victims of this disease so completely that

The Diffusion of Disease

when they looked out on the world they saw only reflections of themselves. Now, the prime characteristic of a great spiritual observer is freedom from excessive self-consciousness; ability to see things in their universal rather than in their personal relations. Charm or power of statement often deludes us into accepting the form of truth for its substance, and genius overpowers us by the splendour with which it invests a distorted vision, a half truth, a destructive falsehood. The fundamental fact that moral disease, working a thousand subtle disorders of the faculties, has dulled or distorted the power of spiritual observation has often been

The Diffusion of Disease

insisted upon by religious teachers, but has never been accepted as a determining fact in the problem of knowledge and of faith. We do not see things as they are because our vision is dimmed; we do not see the highest things clearly because our sight is not powerful enough. This is a simple matter of psychology; its causes are neither remote nor mysterious; they reside in abuses of the faculties and sins of the body, committed generation after generation and creating in the end a vast diffusion of disease, so that few men are entirely normal or completely sane.

XV

The Root of Skepticism

THE plain fact is that society is skeptical of the highest things because its experience has so little in common with them. It does not believe because it is not good enough to believe; it does not see because it has misused its organs of sight; it does not hear because it has dulled its sense of hearing. The highest hopes are incredible to it because it is unworthy of them. It is so far removed from the spirit and works of the Christ that it doubts whether such spiritual achievements exist outside the imaginations of saints; forgetting that the inspirations of the saints have their source in these sublime facts, and

The Root of Skepticism

that in its greatest creations the imagination always takes its flight from the solid ground of reality. Over the face of the world lies a strange mist, bred by the lawlessness, sins, perversities of men, through which many radiant stars are invisible and in which many things appear out of focus, distorted, misshapen; so that what we call progress is not so much rectification of knowledge by discovery of truth, as purification of knowledge by character and correction of the fancies of disease by the clear vision of health. The redemption of society is an intellectual quite as much as a moral process, and the end of it is the restoration of

the race to health. Dr. Johnson declared that a sick man is a scoundrel; he would have been nearer the truth if he had said that no sick man sees things as they are and as a whole.

The Root of Skepticism

The Air of the Hospital

THE world is so much a hospital that even those who are well are affected by the atmosphere in which they live. Among so many semi-blind people they often doubt their own sight, and question their own sanity among so many who are not wholly sane. They cannot escape the infection of an air breathed by generations of sick folk, and their courage is lowered by the fears which overshadow their neighbours. Even when they become ministering spirits they are so exhausted by the drain on their spiritual vitality that they lose the overflowing joy of health and its boundless confidence in the good-

ness at the heart of the world. From time to time men and women of spiritual genius appear who are not imposed upon by the mere processes of thought, the sounding verbiage of knowledge, the false witness of the blind or the half blind, the illusion of the finality of the age; who look through the mist and see the sublime order moving to its appointed ends with the majesty of great stars set in their places by omnipotence. When these prophets, poets, teachers appear faith comes stealing back to the channels that had become hard and dry, and the barren land begins to sing once more. To such as these, who have the pure heart,

The Air of the Hospital

The Air of the Hospital

the obedient will, the mind of the child, the highest things are not only credible: they are inevitable and unescapable. And these men and women are the spiritual experts; the only observers who speak with the authority of eye-witnesses. Against their witness the testimony of the sick, the deaf, the blind has no weight; it is moving, pathetic, freighted with the pathos of suffering; but its value is personal, not universal.

XVII

Knowledge and Character

THE finer the nature, the more credible become the highest hopes of men; faith rests on knowledge, but on the knowledge of the spiritual expert. The vision of divine things is not an emotional ecstasy; it is the clear, penetrating perception of the pure in heart. It is not an easy doctrine that knowledge is a matter of character, and it is often dismissed with contemptuous derision; but it remains true that the reach, scope, and authority of a man's work are conditioned on the man's character, and that no radiancy of genius or skill of hand can conceal the limitations of vision which have their root in limitations

Knowledge and Character

of character. Qualifications of the work of highest rank are inevitable in every field of art, and many explanations are made which miss the truth because it is not quite professional to recognize the force of distinctively moral conditions. Such matters are supposed to belong wholly to religion, and art and religion for the moment are hardly on speaking terms. Neither understands the other, and each has its own peculiar form of bigotry, its own special narrowness.

XVIII

THE chaos of modern life, so far as that vital unity which makes a creative energy of all the forces of humanity is concerned, is easily explicable when one remembers that religion, science, and art—the trinity of faith, knowledge, and beauty in whose coöperation the wholeness and happiness of men rests—come together only on the most formal occasions and with a circumspection which shows deep-going suspicion. Religion has an uneasy feeling that science is stealthily trying to undermine the foundations of her temple; and that art is as frail as she is beautiful. Science affects to believe that religion

The Modern Chaos

The Modern Chaos

is a blind statue from whom the music that made men strong in the morning of the world has departed; and that art is a siren whose singing makes men forget the reign of law. Art treats religion as a schoolmaster who sets a copy-book before the human spirit and blights its imagination with rigid moral maxims; and shrinks from science as from a hard, dry, unsympathetic maker of maps and manuals. And it is no small part of the present training for these great vocations, which some day will be avocations as well, to keep up these imaginary walls and preserve the imaginary distances that are regarded as necessary to the integ-

rity of these noble and beneficent interests and activities, in which the human spirit expresses itself according to its nature; and in all of which, as in a sublime trinity, it finds the rest and strength of complete revelation and perfect expression. When the day of reconciliation comes, born of knowledge that follows fast on sympathy and walks with courage, it will be seen that what we call conduct is not a convention of religion, but a fact of science and a law of art; that achievements are measured by the completeness of harmony, knowledge, and skill behind them; that knowledge has other instruments of observation than the intellect;

The Modern Chaos

The Modern Chaos

and that beauty passes on into vision only when spiritual purity keeps company with it. This truth of religion is also truth of psychology, and must be taken into account in any criticism which aims to be fundamental or final.

Provincialism of Opinion

THE Christmas story, in this oversophisticated age, seems to have passed into the keeping of children and to have become part of the wisdom of youth. Its tenderness, simplicity, and majesty; its childlike bringing together of the shepherds and the angels; of the stable, the kings, and the Christ; its blending of the earthly and the heavenly, of the prose of poverty and the poetry of faith, seem incredible on the boulevards of Paris, in the central roar of London, amid the rushing tides of life in New York. But what ultimate question can be answered in the tumultuous outpouring of the energies of the moment!

Provincialism of Opinion

Is there any spiritual provinciality so narrow and short-sighted as that of the great centres where opinion has become a social convention, and the interest of the moment is the supreme preoccupation? Moral life is nowhere more vigorous than in great cities, nor is religious experience anywhere deeper; but the focusing of energies at one point and the pressure of fierce competition of opinion organized on social lines, and of the collective sentiment of masses of men and women eager to drain the cup of life of the last drop of pleasure, obscure the vision and make the silence of deep woods, the beauty of stars sleeping in lonely moun-

tain pools, the solitude of the full stretch of sky from horizon to horizon, incredible. He who knows these things can hardly make them real to himself in such an alien atmosphere. So far as the ultimate interests of the spirit are concerned and their relations with the universe, there is no provincialism more narrow and blind than that of the great centres of activity or of those who accept the tradition of so-called experience.

Provincialism of Opinion

Age and Wisdom

In nothing are men more misled than in the deference they pay to what is called the wisdom of age based on knowledge of life. To age belongs the reverence due to those who have gone through the strain and stress and upon whom the hand of time rests heavily, but age of itself has no authority; it often means mere piling up of insignificant years. The value of a year depends on the uses to which it is put; and a man may count a century as his own, but gather nothing from his life except a memory of prolonged insignificance. Nor is experience clothed with authority by reason of its antiquity;

its authority rests on its breadth and sanity. The so-called man of the world often assumes a wisdom which his whole life has denied; after refusing for long decades to sit at the feet of life as a pupil he declares himself a prophet because his hair is gray. No judgement of life has authority unless it rests on the broad observation of a sane man. Mass of experience is of no importance; the man who repeats each day the history of the day before, though he live to be a hundred, is a mere child in knowledge. Quality of experience is the only thing that counts; that is to say, clear knowledge of a large area of life. The so-called man of the

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world is really a child in knowledge; he knows only a narrow strip of earth, and he is an uneducated observer even in the little acre on which he has lived. Nor does the long experience of races count unless it is broad and sane; for races, like individuals, sometimes depart for generations from the highway of health and sanity and lose their power of vision. What they learn in these periods of disease is not the order of life, but the disorder in themselves; not universal truth from fundamental facts, but the phenomena of pathology. The so-called experience of life to which we bow as to the wisdom of age is largely a diseased

experience reflecting a distorted image of realities. A thousand years of observation by sick or half-sick observers adds nothing to our knowledge of the order of things, however much it may add to our knowledge of disease. The fact that men and women who have made living a mere chance to build, accumulate or organize pleasure into a profession are agreed that the faith of those who live in and by the spirit is a delusion, has as little importance as the opinion of the negro preacher that the sun goes round the earth. It is not enough to challenge every man who sits in judgement on life with the question, "What do you

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know?" He must answer a more searching question: "How have you lived?"

As we talked of these things the night wore on to the parting hour, and when it came, the splendour of the heavens and the purity of the earth were over and about us. The majesty of power, law, order, bore witness to the fathomless energy streaming through star and sun, and when the door swung open a chill crept into the warmed and lighted room that seemed to rise out of some bottomless gulf of impersonal force. The beauty of the universe was beyond thought; the greatest imagination could only set

the door ajar so that a single beam of the blinding light might find its way to the soul. What was man in the presence of this almost unbearable glory of created things? And then, as we said our good nights, another illusion was dissolved,—the belief that it is possible to interpret Nature apart from man, to read her mind without his mind and her heart without his heart. He holds the key of her mystery in the very structure of his being; in his intelligence lies the vision of her sublime unity and order. He is as much a part of her as star or mountain, and he rises as far above her as the thought which fashions rises above the thing it makes, or the genius

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that divines above the substance it penetrates and comprehends. The law of survival cannot be understood without taking into account man's power of sacrifice, nor can the direction of the vast monument of things be comprehended without the light of his power of love. The story of his life is as much a part of the history of the earth as the forming of continents and the filling of the basins of the seas. Every human affection, devotion, and sacrifice must be reckoned with in any attempt to understand Nature; and the glow of the fire on the hearth on Christmas Eve is as bright with revelation of the mystery of things as the radiance of stars. Syria was

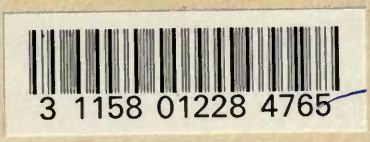
but the background of the wonder story of the Birth, and the majesty of the star but a symbol of the immortal light in the soul of the Child of Bethlehem.

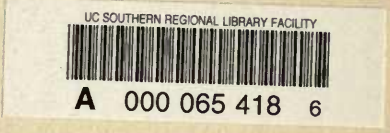
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